State-sponsored cohabitation

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Even as much of America is coming to regret the decades-long decline of the family, a state university right here in Colorado would deal families another blow — on the taxpayers' tab.

The faculty at Colorado State University in Fort Collins is studying a proposal that would confer so-called "domestic partner" benefits on unmarried couples, homosexual as well as heterosexual. The premise of such a measure, in effect at some other universities around the country, is that the live-in lovers of faculty and staff are the equivalent of spouses and thus should reap the same full range of benefits granted to spouses and children of employees.

At stake at CSU are employer-funded benefits like health coverage, tuition grants and family leave. Typically, in private industry and most government employment, only employees' spouses and children may obtain such benefits.

But to CSU faculty members recently surveyed, the extension of these privileges to any partner regardless of status is "the fair thing to do," as a personnel official at the school characterized the faculty responses. Some faculty members contend a lack of medical insurance for unmarried couples is "hypocritical." As well, the school officially prohibits discrimination based on "sexual orientation" — a policy that would have been barred by Amendment 2 were the amendment not put on hold by the courts.

The school's faculty benefits committee is now studying the proposal; the university's governing board would have to approve the notion before it could become official. As of Wednesday, CSU President Al Yates appeared to be backing away from the plan as lawmakers from El Paso County expressed indignation at it. The CSU faculty would be wise to heed them and shelve this idea for good.

Extending benefits to homosexual partners in particular poses a controversy in itself. But even setting aside that nettlesome issue, one wonders just what message the CSU faculty hopes to send out about marriage and family.

At a time when policy makers, academics and journalists across the philosophical spectrum are decrying the social repercussions of unwed motherhood and the devaluation of the two-parent family, CSU would devalue it further. According to CSU Faculty Council President C.W. Miller:

"For people that have lived together for years, why shouldn't they get the same benefits as people who've *signed the paper*?"

In other words, he and his peers would take us back to some half-baked, '60s sentiment that unmarried couples, gay or straight, are the moral equivalent of holy matrimony. It's just a piece of paper, after all.

That opinion is their prerogative, of course. But it's not their right to stamp the state's official imprimatur on such a notion by granting publicly funded benefits to unmarried partners. Nor should the faculty force Colorado taxpayers to give their blessing by paying for this silly scheme.

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through the deep white sand, finally disappearing over a steep dune. A tern flew straight up into the sky above it."

Following, Alex and Iris find a circus set up just beyond the dunes. They attempt to enter, but they don't have the $30 entrance fee. A passing performer allows them in on the condition that Iris must volunteer for one of the acts. It turns out to be a disappearing act, part of a magician's show. At the end, Iris fails

In some respects, "The Circus of the Earth and the Air" is an impressive first novel. Stevens writes well. He knows how to keep his narrative flowing no matter how eccentric the events he describes. The problem perhaps lies with the genre itself. This sort of thing is enjoying a literary vogue right now, led by writers such as Paul Auster, Angela Carter and Jonathan Carroll, but I have never found it very satisfactory.

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